

the sights. I got his plunder from the ranch that night and he left the next morning—and I'll bet he was glad when he heard the conductor hoo! out "all abo'rd!"

My part was what these actors call a "thinking part" and a darned poor specimen of even *that*! No, sirree, I never let on, but what I'd happened into the procession sort of promisc'us and accidental and that I was as much surprized as anybody—and that was the Lord's truth! Shucks! What would I want to butt in with my story for? Salthouse and his bunch got what was long-coming to them and I reckon they was satisfied, leastwise no one has heard to the contrary.

Little Joe and his wife and his and her

folks could sleep in peace, no more Salthouse nightmares, so they was satisfied. Jesu Maria and his compatriots got much honor and enough mazuma to keep them drunk and satisfied for a month. Manny got even more atmosphere than he expected—but I don't think he was really satisfied. The old man got a lot of his money back and that was more than he expected.

And as for your Uncle Charlie, he got some new slants on Mex's and the doings of Old Lady Fate when she plays a free hand and he was the most satisfiedest one of the lot after things had got settled! Why should I open my mouth about it? Tell me that!

✓ 20,000 Words. ✓

NOT THREE OF A KIND

A COMPLETE
NOVELETTE

by
Frank Robertson

Aug 20 - 1923



Author of "The Mad Commanders," "Sportin' Blood," etc.

THERE was a smile on Pete Hailey's face, a half-humorous, half-sardonic grin which would be interpreted according to whether Pete was liked or disliked by the interpreter. It was the smile which Pete usually wore. To his friends, and they were many, that smile meant good-humored good fellowship. To his enemies, and they were equally many, that smile contained a sneer and a menace.

His brother Job, two years younger than

he, would have deprecated it as a sign of Pete's ready propensity to get into trouble—trouble being the thing of things which Job hated.

So marked were these characteristics of the brothers that their younger brother, Jeff, had with equal derision of both nicknamed them respectively "The Apostle of Violence" and the "Apostle of Peace."

There had never actually been any bad blood between those three brothers, but the different composition of their natures was

the death. Jesu had got to that stage of desperation about Salthouse, he was dead sure that that bad-man had traced him to the depot, and had come with his gang to wipe out Jesu and any bunch that he might get up and, what was more to the point, he'd got his gang of Mex's to believe the same thing and that was why they was *all* sweating and nervous the night before.

So they concluded that they'd "see Salthouse first," they crept around the Hotel that night and around the shack and got no chance for mischief, but they overheard the men in the shack say that Salthouse would be down in the morning and they also overheard a whole lot of other talk that tickled me greatly, for it proved that I had guessed Salthouse's plans to the last item.

They cached themselves among some piles of railroad ties which were close to the shack and laid for Salthouse to come in the morning. Also they had a fine plan of assault and they picked out a big switch-tie and laid it handy where they could grab it in a minute and bust the back door in, and to show how earnest they were they cut out all cigaret smoking whilst they were waiting, being afraid the smell or the light might give them away.

They saw Salthouse go into the shack in the morning and got ready for their attack, but they did not see Manny go in. Six of them lifted the tie, carried it quietly to the back door and drove the door in and nearly across the room. Salthouse must have been standing with his back close to it and got laid out cold by the blow and two or three of the others evidently got knocked down. Anyway, there was only one up when they got in and he had no chance to use his gun, so he got pretty well all the knives.

Jesu Maria took no chances with Salthouse, he gave him the knife about a dozen times from the look of his body, he said that he "desired to make certain that the *señor* was dead"—and he took the best way to do it! Manny had a narrow escape, but the ropes around him saved him. Jesu remembered having seen him with me, so he got the place of honor in the procession. There had been no shots, there wasn't time for them on the part of the besieged and the besiegers stuck to their national weapon, so that is why no one outside knew anything as to what was going on.

It sure made some story and it lost noth-

ing in my interpreting. Some friendly soul gave Jesu a big drink of real liquor and, after that he sure made himself out as a savior of young married couples, an avenger of abducted females and a hero in Class A! He did not mention me much in his narrative and what he did say about me I censored out.

The girl identified Salthouse and that was the finishing touch, Joe and Little Joe filled the Mex's hats half-full of silver, the crowd filled 'em full and even Manny got rid to the hotel on some of the fellows' shoulders—they didn't exactly see what his play had been in the game, but he'd been in it all right and he was the only one on our side that had got at all hurt or lost any blood—so they toted him up in state, set him on the hotel gallery in a chair, gave him three cheers and a tiger and left him most confused in his mind.

On the whole I think that he was somewhat peeved because his best source of information had cashed in before he had exhausted it. He showed me his notes on Salthouse's information and I'll say this: I had done my best as an amateur liar, but Salthouse's stuff made mine look like dry statistics and I don't wonder that Manny sort of regretted him. I tended him as nurse and the next morning he says—

"I'm surely greatly obliged to you for all that you have done for me but I think that I will leave for New York in the morning if the doctor thinks that it will be wise for me to do so."

I just couldn't help it, I says—

"Have you got enough Southwest atmosphere, do you think, to write that article?"

Well, he sure surprized me, him so particular in the way he talked! He says:

"Atmosphere! —fire, you mean! I'm here just one day, knocked down, tied up, bruised and my throat nearly cut and have to lie still and see a man stabbed to death! ATMOSPHERE? To — with such atmosphere!"

I didn't mention the subject to him any more; for some reason or other it seemed to excite and peeve him. When I give him the news that the wounded man died natural, that the citizens had strung up the others and included Salthouse in the hanging, he wanted to leave town that night—said it would be just like the citizens to want to take him out there and show him

such that as a rule each one mortally detested the friends of the other two. For that reason none of them cared to work for the same outfits. All three were cow-punchers—and good ones. Pete was star twister for the J D Combined, ten miles from the town of Waterberry. Job was foreman of the Bar S, twenty-five miles from Waterberry, and southeast of the J D Combined, which was due east of town. Jeff was an unpretentious horse-wrangler for the Snake Creek outfit in the Dug-Out Hills, some thirty miles northeast of the J D Combined.

They met occasionally in town, or at various round-ups, and once in a great while one of them was moved to pay a brief visit to another one. But each one seemed to have many friends closer than either of his brothers.

To return to Pete and his smile. For thirty seconds that smile had been upon his face while he deliberated a problem. And a minute was as long as Pete ever permitted himself to make up his mind. The question was: Should he open a gate? A simple procedure in the main; but apt to lead to complications in view of the fact that the gate gave entrance to the ranch of old Juke Armstrong, and that Juke had ordered Pete Hailey to stay off of that ranch on the minimum penalty of being filled full of buck-shot.

The minute passed, and Pete swung the gate open and rode in. There was some suggestion of a hawk in his rather highly arched nose, and in the smile that was upon his lips, but not in his eyes, which were gray, keen, alert, and withal filled with the inordinate curiosity of a ten-year-old. That accounted for much of the trouble which Pete was continually getting into. He always had a boyish curiosity to see what was going to happen next. Also, he was given to a certain amount of boasting and was always ready to try to remove mountains in an effort to make good his various bluffs.

As he rode over the forbidden ground it seemed to the casual eye that he rode with the same graceful negligence with which he had approached the gate, but in reality every nerve was tensed, and he was as alert as a badgered rattlesnake. The .44 at his hip hung at precisely the angle where his hand could grip it, and his arm could flash down and back as if it were a powerful elastic band stretched to its utmost capac-

ity. Pete was fast with a gun. He knew he was fast, and others knew it.

Yet he knew just as well that old Juke Armstrong was not to be fooled with, and there were other men on Juke's ranch as well whom he needed to watch. Chiefly one George Knapp, Juke's foreman. The worst of it was that his approach to the ranch on that side was across a half-mile of open meadow where he stood no chance to avoid being seen from the ranch-house, yet his pride urged him on and he came, riding easily in the accepted jog-trot of cowland.

Still, Pete was not entirely without caution, and he had timed his arrival at nine o'clock in the morning, an hour in which old Juke was almost certain to be irrigating and his men otherwise engaged away from the house. As it happened Pete guessed partially right. Old Juke was too busy stopping a rat-hole in the side of a canal to notice who came or went on his ranch.

George Knapp, however, had seen Pete enter. The foreman had started to ride the range that day, and he was far enough away to require a pair of field glasses to see who it was, and then his identification had been of the tall, raw-boned, bald-faced sorrel which Pete rode, rather than of Pete himself. Knapp had promptly wheeled his horse and headed for the ranch-house on a dead run.

George Knapp was a good-looking man of thirty-five or forty, but his face was far from being either pretty or friendly as he dashed toward the ranch-house. It was distorted with hate, and one good at reading faces might have detected signs of a desperate, wolfish fear in the background.

As it happened, Knapp was not alone in seeing Pete approach. From an up-stairs window, overlooking the meadow, a girl saw him coming, and her heart went into an instant flutter. She ducked instinctively away from the window, but in a moment she was back, peering cautiously through the gauzy lace curtains. A frown and a smile struggled for mastery on her face a moment, and the smile won.

She turned away from the window again, and before Pete reached the house she was amazingly transformed. There had been a dab of dough, a smudge of flour and a speck or two of dirt on her house dress. She had shifted into a clean dress at lightning speed, given a pat and a toss to her hair, dabbed a

bit of powder on her nose, seized a dust-cloth and was ready to descend at the right moment to be taken entirely by surprise while engaged in her usual morning house-chores.



SHE was industriously dusting off the backs of a couple of porch chairs when Pete rode up and lolled in his saddle with lazy, indolent grace. Her start of surprise was admirably executed.

"Why—why—Pete!" she gasped.

Pete permitted himself an appreciative glance at the girl and an apprehensive one around the premises. He knew that if old Juke was to catch him there he would not hesitate to make good on his threat of buck-shot if it was possible.

"Lo, Kitty," he said genially. "Gee, kid, you don't mean to say that you kin git through a whole mornin's work, an' keep lookin' as fresh an' purty as all that."

"Oh, I haven't done all the work," she admitted demurely. Then she added with genuine apprehension, "Pete, you oughtn't to come here."

"An' leave the field clear for George Knapp!" he said. "I reckon not."

"But if dad ever catches you here he'll fly off the handle and do something terrible."

"I reckon he'll have to be movin' right fast if he gits the drop on me," Pete said complacently.

"D'ye mean to say that you'd shoot my father?" Kitty demanded crisply.

"Shore not; but I don't reckon he'll let any lead loose in my direction while I've got him covered with a .44," Pete stated. "The fact is," he went on, "as long as George Knapp hangs around here 'no admittance' signs don't go with me."

"Oh, bother George Knapp," the girl said pertly. "Do you know that dad has ordered him to stay away from me too, an' me not to look at him except when I'm pourin' his coffee, or something like that?"

"Which is more than a plenty," Pete declared, still disgruntled.

"But that don't help you any—dad would just as soon shoot you as to look at you," she pointed out.

Pete laughed good naturedly.

"The old man needs a spankin', an' if he don't act a little more reasonable he's liable to git it one of these days. When he thinks he can keep me from comin' around here, honey girl, he's just

like a bull-pup tryin' to comb a grizzly."

He dismounted slowly and walked up to the girl on the porch. She glanced around nervously, as if about to beat a retreat.

"Don't hang around here," she said earnestly. "I tell you dad means business. That stunt of yours in taking those cattle away from our riders last Fall and giving them to those nesters they belonged to without charging them anything for gatherin' 'em sure made dad awful mad. He says you're too high-handed an' stuck on yourself. You think you can run the whole range, but he's out to show you that you can't."

"Yeah; but look here. That was pure graft. Knapp wanted to charge 'em ten dollars a head for their dogeys, an' it didn't cost a darn cent to gather 'em up with the rest in the round-up. So why hold the poor — up just because they're too poor to hire a rider?"

"That's just your way of looking at it," she argued primly. "Dad's a cattleman, and if these nesters keep coming in and are permitted to run their cattle free there won't be any range for anybody." She was obviously quoting.

"Well, he said, 'there's arguments on the nesters, side of the question,' but I'm not interested in that now. What I stopped in to see you about was this: I'm goin' in to Waterberry, an' I wondered if there wasn't somethin' I could bring you—a diamon' ring, say?"

Under his intense, self-possessed scrutiny the girl's face flamed.

"Oh, I—I— don't know," she worried.

Suddenly she looked past him, and her face clouded with apprehension.

It seemed that Pete did not take time to whirl. He was facing one way, and all at once he was facing the other. He had not lost his negligent, indolent manner for a moment, yet his eyes were upon George Knapp almost as soon as the girl's were. Though his hand nestled upon the handle of his gun, his face had not lost that half-impudent, half-curious grin.

Knapp's face had changed entirely from the expression he had worn while riding in. He was pleasant, even friendly.

"Hello, Peter," he called. "How's business?"

One of Pete's secret resentments was his name. It was bad enough to be called Pete, but the full name made him fighting mad;

A WORD from Frank Robertson concerning his story in this issue:

Salt Lake City, Utah.

There'll probably be fellows rise up and say that such sheep shearing can't be done. I've worked in and around shearing corrals for years and I know that it's remarkable shearing, but not sensational. Many shearers have done better than Owen Davis's best mark of 259. The hard part of his task was to hold to an average of over two hundred a day month after month—yet other men have done it. The details as to prices, crew, etc., are, of course, correct.

I have often wondered why the American sheep-shearers have been so neglected in fiction. With the possible exception of the lumber-jacks, there is no class of men who work so hard while they are employed. Twenty to thirty dollars a day is no unusual earning, and mostly they are a hard fighting, hard drinking, poker-playing outfit. They are not to be confused with sheep-herders. Few shearers ever herd. They are a distinct class.

So far as I know no prize or bonus was ever offered as I have it in the story, but plenty of sheepmen have offered bonuses for single corrals and short runs.

Best wishes to *Adventure* and the Camp-Fire bunch.—FRANK ROBERTSON.

been instrumental in having stayed the execution of justice thus long.

AN INTERESTING letter from the principal of a boy's academy in China, replying to statements of another comrade as to Chinese ability to pronounce the letter "r":

McPhersons Boys' Academy
Ichowfu, Shantung, China.

Comrades of the Camp-Fire: May I come from the shadows long enough to say my say and then return? I have followed Camp-Fire discussions for many years, and have wished I had something to add to the interest.

Comrade W. J. Sherwood makes a few remarks about the Chinese language which I read with interest, but can not entirely agree with. The part that I take exception to is his statement about the use of *r*—or rather the lack of any *r* in the Chinese language.

HAVING lived in Shantung for more than ten years, and using the vernacular constantly in my work, I do know something about the dialect in this Province. What it may be in the south, I

though he was wise enough never to display resentment over such a cause, knowing that it would only make matters worse.

"My business is all right," he replied coolly.

"That so?" Knapp said, somewhat discomfited.

This Hailey fellow had a disagreeable way of always making the other fellow do the leading, and then putting him in bad.

"Thought maybe it was bein' a trifle neglected," he said with a mirthless laugh. "I reckon it's a good thing, though, that Juke ain't neglectin' his business this bright Summer mornin', or he'd be makin' things lively around here about now."

"Yeah?" Pete inquired, mildly curious, as he rolled a cigaret.

"He was steppin' along this way just now; but I'd seen you ride up here, so I overhauled him, an' told him about a dry patch of hay that needed irrigatin' a way down yonder, an' that headed him off," Knapp explained with the air of a man who has just conferred a great favor.

"Gosh, you must take a burnin' interest in yer boss's hay all of a sudden," Pete commented.

Knapp's face flushed.

"It was to keep him from makin' trouble for you," he said angrily.

As far as finesse was concerned, and what he was pleased to call "brains," Knapp considered himself immeasurably superior to this puncher, whom he considered a bluffer. It irked him sorely that Pete always seemed to make good on his bluffs, and invariably seemed to hold the better hand.

"Oh!" Pete exclaimed in mock surprise. "That's the first time I ever knew I needed anybody to take trouble off my hands. Gen'rally speakin' I'm able to take care o' myself."

"Oh, well, if I'd 'a' known you was gunnin' for the old man I'd have let him come," Knapp said, managing a somewhat uncomfortable laugh. "If it comes right down to it I reckon you'll find Juke able to take care of himself that-a-way also."

"He has got better nerve than some," Pete said laconically.

Knapp pretended to overlook the insult.

"Goin' to town?" he asked.

"Reckon so," Pete replied.

"You ain't by any chance figurin' on comin' back this way I reckon?" Knapp queried.

"Well, now, I might at that," Pete said, with a sort of challenge in his voice.

"If you do I wonder if you'll do me a little favor?"

"Well—I might," Pete said noncommittally.

"I sent my rifle down to Tony's gun-shop the other day to have it fixed an' cleaned up, an' I'd like mighty well to have it back to kill a — timber wolf that's been sneakin' around here. If you could fetch it without any trouble I'd be much obliged."

Pete inspected the man keenly. It was a neighborly request, and nothing out of the ordinary. Only one thing seemed to make it appear that there might be some ulterior purpose behind it. Knapp knew that it would bring him back on the ranch. As if he had seen Pete catch that point the foreman hastened to say:

"Of course I wouldn't ask it, the way you an' Juke feel toward each other, unless you happen to be comin' back this way anyhow. If you do a rifle under your leg won't put you in any more danger I reckon."

Pete sensed in a vague way that there was something behind all this, some hidden subtlety. But such things were not in his line. His one reaction was that if Knapp was trying to slip something over he'd accept the challenge and meet things as they came up. Let trickery be for them that needed it; his dependence was in his fists and his gun.

"Sure I'll bring it," he said a bit defiantly.

"All right, but don't feel obligated," Knapp insisted. "If you git to thinkin' it over an' think it's too dangerous why just let it go. Or better yet, you can just lean it up against the outside of the gate, an' I'll come an' git it."

That, as Knapp very well knew, was exactly the statement that would make Pete bring the gun or die in the attempt. If it should be the latter eventuality Knapp would not be sorry. He turned on his heel and led his horse slowly toward the barn.

"You'll git your gun, an' you won't need to come to the gate after it," Pete called after him.

Then he turned to the girl.

"Well, Kitty, what about that ring? I've been wantin' to git y' one for a long time now."

"Not—not now," she said hurriedly. "And I wish you hadn't promised to bring

that rifle for George. I don't want you to come here any more. I could meet you some place off the ranch, and there wouldn't be so much chance of a killing or a fight."

"Then you like me enough to be willin' to meet me places," he said, fastening at once upon the only thing that interested him.

"Yes," she said in a low voice; "but that's as far as it will ever go unless you make friends with dad. And you'll have to apologize for taking those dogeys and promise to mend your ways in order to do that."

"Like—— I will," he said bluntly. "I don't take water from no man. I always did take care of myself, an' I always will."

Later on he would probably recede from that hot-headed position and be willing to make concessions, but not now.

"Then you needn't come around me," the girl cried sharply.

Later on she, too, might be willing to compromise. But not now. There was a door at her very elbow, and before he had time to catch his breath she had whisked inside.

"—— old tree-toad," he muttered under his breath. "I'll just naturally take him across my knee till he sees reason."

Then, because he felt foolish standing there talking to himself, he turned on his heel and walked back to his horse. A moment later he was on his way to Waterberry.

II.



AMONG the men employed by Juke Armstrong was one, "Whitey" Pett, by name, who was sponsored by George Knapp. Whitey was a runtish man with mouse eyes, languid lips and the bony, dangling fingers of the typical human vulture. With the right training Whitey would have developed into a fairly successful pickpocket or a second-rate gambler; but, handicapped by his environment and an inborn mediocrity, he was under the stern necessity of eking out his slender winnings as a cheap, tin-horn gambler by pretending to be a working man long enough to get on a pay-roll.

As Pete Hailey rode away from Juke Armstrong's yard George Knapp and Whitey were in conference in the bunk-house, where Whitey had crept as soon

after going to work as possible to rest his tiring muscles.

George Knapp was a pretty shrewd judge of human nature. As long as Pete Hailey was around he knew that there was little use for him to become an active suitor for Kitty Armstrong's favor. Therefore, his policy was to make himself agreeable to the girl in a quiet way until Pete was eliminated. He intended that Pete should be eliminated, but at no cost of danger to George Knapp.

His had been the active mind which had prevailed upon old Juke to order Pete to stay off the ranch, but this had been but the beginning of his scheming. For one thing this elimination of Pete had not eliminated; that Apostle of Violence was not to be deterred by any command backed up only by a mere threat of physical force.

The fact that Pete was open as the day to read had permitted Knapp to lay part of his plan before this day when Pete had come on to the ranch in open defiance of Juke Armstrong. He had known, positively, that Pete would take such action sooner or later. And so his rifle had been left at Tony's gun-shop in Waterberry to be called for on order. Likewise, a brand new duplicate of it reposed under Knapp's bed, and only he and Whitey Pett knew of it.

"Well, Whitey," Knapp said, "I'm in a position now to put you next to that thousand dollars I promised you. Are you interested?"

"I might be at that," Whitey said, a hungry gleam coming into his eye.

"It'll only take a few hours waiting, a minute's work, an' a close mouth. Reckon you can manage it?"

"I can," Whitey declared positively. Then he added coldly, "When a man talks like that it means murder."

"Well?" Knapp challenged with equal coldness.

"Oh, nothing—only—I could use two thousand."

"Where d'ye reckon I'm goin' to git all that money?" Knapp demanded heatedly.

"Tell me who you want killed, an' I can answer you better," Whitey suggested.

"It don't make any difference to you—I'll arrange everything."

"Come clean," Whitey Pett grinned.

"Well, —— you, it's Juke Armstrong," Knapp jerked out.

"I see," Whitey said, indulging in a low whistle.

"You see what?"

"Where you come into a fine ranch, git a wife an' everything. An' where I land more than any lousy two thousand dollars!"

George Knapp flushed angrily. He had not expected Whitey to grab the whole plot in one mouthful. But that was the stake for which he was playing. Old Juke Armstrong had got into the Waterberry range country when the getting was good, and now, though he was called "old," he was only a trifle over fifty with an apparent lease of life of many, many years. Also he owned property which stood him in the clear to the extent of fifty thousand dollars. Also, and with emphasis, every cent of that property would be inherited by Kitty Armstrong as soon as old Juke's lease on life was foreclosed.

At first it had been Knapp's idea to pit Juke against Pete. But this would only solve half his problem as one of them would be left alive, and he instinctively recognized that either one of them was infinitely superior to himself in a man to man contest. What he planned was a single action that would destroy them both. Now it seemed threatened by Whitey's consummate greed.

"You can go plumb to —," Knapp declared savagely. "I'm done with you."

"Oh, no, you hain't," Whitey grinned. "Supposin' I go an' tell what's in the wind?"

"Nobody won't believe you—an' at best you won't git a cent."

It dawned upon Whitey that he did not hold all the cards after all—and he wanted the money. His tone altered, and after a quarter of an hour's pulling and hauling terms were agreed upon.

An hour later the two men left the stableyard very discreetly. Whitey Pett slunk away through the willows which grew along a creek that flowed through the ranch, and he carried a brand new .250-3000 rifle. Knapp left the yards on horseback, apparently headed for the open range. But after a time Knapp changed his course, and when near the gate that opened the road to Waterberry he halted and concealed his horse in a thick clump of brush. Ten minutes later he joined Whitey Pett near the top of a lava knoll outside the fence and about two hundred yards from the gate.

The knoll was composed entirely of jum-

bled rock, criss-crossed with alternating ledges of rock, and cracks and chasms. Knapp found Whitey hunkered down in one of the crevices, well out of sight, and whiling away the time by getting the range to the gate with the rifle, which he had thrust through a triangular hole between the rocks.

"You sure you won't miss at that distance?" Knapp asked anxiously. "Everything depends on your bein' able to kill him with the first shot, an' so — dead that he can't talk."

Whitey laughed with easy assurance.

"With this rifle I could shoot the ear off a ground-squirrel at that distance."

He fondled the gun lovingly.

"Be sure you do it," Knapp said harshly.

For several hours they waited. While Whitey pretended to doze Knapp kept a keen lookout down the road with his field-glasses. The place where Pete Hailey would first come in sight was on the crest of a ridge some five miles away. At that distance Knapp figured he would be easily able to identify the big, bald-faced sorrel which Pete rode. But Pete would be visible for only a few minutes, and then he would pass out of sight and would not appear again until he was less than a mile away.

For that reason Knapp had to be alert. He had studied the gait of the big sorrel very carefully, and he estimated that his jog trot would bring him from the crest of the ridge to the gate in about fifty minutes. Into those fifty minutes Knapp expected to crowd a lot of action.

At last, just after three o'clock, Pete Hailey topped the ridge. Even at that distance Knapp could make out the easy, nonchalant way his enemy rode. He ground his teeth with hate. A moment later Pete passed out of sight, and Knapp sprang up. He slammed his glasses into the case with a bang and turned to his confederate.

"He's comin'," he said crisply.

Whitey Pett swung himself to his knees and thrust the rifle-barrel through the aperture in the rocks that commanded a view of the gate. He took a final squint along the sights and announced himself ready.

"Be sure you don't make no blunders," Knapp cautioned.

"Don't worry none about me," Whitey grinned.



GEORGE KNAPP scrambled down off the knoll, and by his keeping in the crevices even the peak of his high hat was invisible. He hurried to his horse, and then rode furiously until he reached the ranch-house; but despite his hurry he circled the place first, and came in from the opposite direction.

He knew that old Juke always took a long noon, and he was a little afraid that he might have some difficulty finding him; but his fears proved to be unfounded. Old Juke was just leaving the ranch with his shovel across his shoulder.

"Oh, Juke," Knapp called.

Armstrong stopped and waited. "Well?" he demanded gruffly.

Knapp knew that his own days on Armstrong's ranch were numbered if Juke was permitted to live. As well as if he had been told he knew that Juke was only keeping him on until he could find an available man to take his place.

"I wasn't goin' to mention the matter," Knapp said suavely but with a hint of apology; "but I've been thinkin' the thing over, an' I decided that you'd ought to be told. That skunk, Pete Hailey, was here to see Kit this mornin'."

The look of intense rage with which Juke received the news was intensely gratifying to Knapp.

"He was?" Armstrong quavered.

"He was. He also said when he went away that he was goin' to call again this afternoon to bring her somethin' from town. Said he'd show you how to order him where he could go, an' where he couldn't."

"By —, I ordered that high-chinned galoot to stay off my ranch, an' I'm goin' to see he does it," Juke declared explosively.

"I wouldn't be brash if I were you," Knapp counseled gently. "Of course if you just meet him at the gate an' stop him from comin' in it'd be all right, but don't go runnin' into trouble."

"I'll run my business without your advice," Armstrong snapped.

He dropped his shovel and dashed into the house. In a minute or so he was back with a shotgun in the crook of his arm.

Knapp stole a surreptitious look at his watch and smiled.

A few minutes later, when Juke came out of the barn with his saddle-horse, Knapp was entering the kitchen where Kitty Armstrong was working. He was careful not

to come to the object of his visit too quickly. Finally, however, he informed the girl that her father suspected Pete would try to come on the ranch that afternoon and had gone to head him off.

"I just mentioned it to him that Pete might come, because I knew there would be war sure if Pete took him by surprize. I thought mebbe Juke would have time to think it over, an' let it pass this once; but instead o' that he hit the trail *pronto* to head him off. I'm afraid there'll be bloodshed. It's a case of two fools comin' together. Yer dad's a fire-eatin' fool, but I'm afraid he ain't no match fer Pete."

Having explained matters, Knapp assumed a sorrowful expression.

Ordinarily the girl would have spiritedly resented Knapp's presumption in calling men fools whom she believed to be his superior in every way. Now, however, she was too worried over the possibility of a clash to bother with personalities.

"We've got to stop it," she said energetically. "Will you saddle a horse for me?"

"You bet I will," Knapp said earnestly. "I'm just as anxious to avoid trouble on this ranch as you are."

By the time the girl had thrown on her riding togs Knapp was ready with two horses. They swung on and galloped swiftly up the road toward the gate.

III



WHEN half a mile from Armstrong's gate Pete Hailey saw a man ride up to the gate at a furious gallop and stop. His eye, trained to distinguish objects at long distances, told him that this was Juke Armstrong. He knew that the ranchman's arrival was not accidental, and his pride rose as another man's gorge might rise at some disgusting object. Nothing on earth could prevail upon him to dodge the encounter.

Straight along the road he continued at the same jog trot, slouching in the saddle, his hands at rest in front of him. His eyes were tense and alert under the wide-brimmed hat, but he feigned an utter indifference, pretending to be entirely occupied by his own deep thoughts.

Old Juke sat upon a heavy-set gray horse. His shotgun was in one hand, and he brandished it as a child might brandish a stick, quite unconscious of the movement.

That nonchalant approach of Pete Hailey goaded him into an anger that was well-nigh uncontrollable. By the time Pete was within hearing-distance the rancher's face was quivering and froth was spattering his iron-gray beard.

Pete began to breathe easier as he came close enough to note the old man's condition, and he quickly made his plans. Though always ready for trouble his was not the nature of a killer, and he had no desire to force an issue that would have to be settled by a killing. On the other hand that unyielding pride of his would not permit him to do anything that might be construed as showing fear. First he would chaff the old man a bit, get him roused to the very point of committing murder; then crack a joke at his expense and pretend to give up trying to gain entrance to the ranch.

But he had no intention of giving up. He figured that Juke would hasten to the next gate to head him off there, and in the mean time he would double back to this gate, ride in, deliver the rifle to Knapp, and make his peace with Kitty. All this, he thought, should convince Juke Armstrong that he was not to be lightly ordered around as if he were a mere child.

"Don't y' come a step nigher," old Juke roared when Pete was within a couple of rods of the gate.

The brandishing gun came to a momentary halt as it was pointed directly at Pete; but it was held in one hand as a pointer, and not at the shoulder.

Pete sawed back on the reins as if suddenly surprized out of a deep reverie.

"What the —— Why, hello, Juke," he exclaimed.

"Pete Hailey, I told ye not to come on to my place," Juke howled.

"Did ya? Well, I ain't on it, am I?" Pete countered good-naturedly.

His bold, characteristic smile was on his face.

"Ya was on it this mornin,' an' yer headed here now," Juke charged.

"Look here, Juke," Pete said mildly. "If you keep on talkin' that way I'll begin to think I ain't welcome."

Juke was pitiful in his helpless anger.

"—— ye," he snarled, "ye ain't welcome. An' if I ever ketch y' on my land again I'll make y' eat so much lead y' won't be able to pack it off!"

Pete had been cautiously advancing until he was little more than a rod from the gate that separated them.

"But look here, Juke," Pete began to argue, "George Knapp asked me to bring him his rifle from town, an' of course I've got to take it to him. If I took it on by he might think I was tryin' to steal it."

"Don't arger with me," Juke snorted. "If ye've got Knapp's rifle give it to me, an' ride the other way."

Pete was really enjoying the situation. All he wanted was to show Juke that he could go wherever he chose, and it would be just as much fun to outwit him as to whip him. It occurred to him that giving Juke Knapp's rifle would help in the scheme he had planned out. He reached down and began taking the rifle out from under his leg. At that moment there came the crack of a rifle from the lava knoll.

With a vicious jerk Pete wrenched the rifle free, while he looked to see what had happened. To his amazement old Juke Armstrong was swaying in the saddle, a look of vast incredulity and astonishment on his face. Even as Pete caught the look Juke caved in and slid to the ground. As he struck he coughed, and blood spattered his whiskers. He made one convulsive effort to breathe and dropped back—dead.

Instinctively Pete looked to see whether the rifle was loaded. He jerked back the lever and saw that there was an empty cartridge in the breach. With an oath he threw it out and jerked in a loaded one from the magazine. The assassin, of course, was not in sight, and Pete's characteristic move was to see if he could run him down. He dashed up the slope of the knoll on a run until checked by a deep chasm. Then he turned his horse and picked his way around the west side, angling upward as fast as he could.

Whitey Pett had lingered just long enough to make sure that his shot had been effective; then he hurriedly thrust the new rifle into a small crevice in the rock just large enough for the rifle to go in. He picked up a small boulder and jammed it into the end of the crevice so that the rifle was entirely concealed. Then he scrambled down the east side of the knoll, scrambling from one crevice to another, but always keeping out of sight.

Once at the bottom of the knoll he made a brush run for the fence and dived into the

protective bushes like a rabbit. A few minutes later he entered the road just ahead of Kitty Armstrong and George Knapp. In his hands was a hammer and a pair of wire nippers. His pockets bulged with staples. He waited for the man and woman.

Kitty stopped her horse.

"What happened, Whitey?" she demanded. "We heard a shot."

"I was fixin' fence," Whitey said breathlessly, "an' I seen the old man ridin' by — bent. I didn't pay no 'tention till I heard that shot you did. But a minute ago I seen Pete Hailey beatin' it for the top of that lava knoll."

Kitty spurred her horse madly, and Knapp had difficulty keeping up. They speedily reached the spot where Juke Armstrong sprawled in the dirt.

"Oh, he's killed him!" the girl cried.

Involuntarily her eyes sought the top of the knoll where Whitey said Pete had been, and at that moment Pete reached the top and was outlined boldly against the sky-line.

At sight of Knapp and the girl Pete swept down off the knoll like a tornado, taking rocks and crevices with reckless abandon. The big, bald-faced sorrel was equal to it and miraculously escaped a fall. The girl was on her knees with her father's head in her lap, and Knapp was awkwardly trying to assist her, when Pete arrived. Kitty looked up at the puncher with tear-stained face, but her eyes were filled with bitterness and reproach.

"You've killed him, Pete," George Knapp said calmly.

"Killed him? —, I didn't shoot him!" Pete asserted. "It was somebody up on the knoll."

He met the girl's horrified, contemptuous gaze and realized that he was not believed. For once his self-conceit failed him. He realized in a flash how things looked. Armstrong had ordered him to stay off his ranch. He had trespassed once that day and had boldly announced his intention of doing so again. Armstrong had met him at the very edge of his land. They had quarreled. Armstrong had been killed, and the real murderer had got completely away. Then two people had found him there. He knew it looked bad. But he was quickly made to realize that he had not surmised the worst.

"It looks mighty bad for you, Hailey," George Knapp said coolly. "Armstrong had

a right to resist your enterin' his place, an' he was killed on his own land."

"I didn't kill him, I tell you," Pete said dully.

Knapp opened the gate and walked to the place where Pete's horse had stood while he talked with Juke Armstrong. He examined the tracks, then those that Pete's horse had just made.

"The print of the toe-calks on your horse's shoes show that he was standin' right there just a few minutes ago," he said.

Then he stepped a few feet away and picked up an empty cartridge.

"I reckon there ain't no use for you to deny it, Hailey," he said somberly. "This here is a shell that fits my rifle that you're carryin'. There ain't another gun like mine in this whole country."

"I jerked it out to——"

"I'll tell you something else. There were seven loaded shells in that rifle when I left it with Tony. I'll bet that now there's only six."

"—— you, you're tryin' to frame me," Pete snarled. "I'll bet you killed him yourself."

"Did I, Kit?" Knapp asked simply.

The girl raised her grief-stricken face and regarded Pete with unspeakable loathing.

"George was with me when we heard the shot," she snapped.

Just then Whitey Pett came up.

"There's the snake that killed Juke, then," Pete grated, his hand sliding for his six-shooter.

"Come off," Whitey said brazenly. "I've been fixin' fence, but I practically saw you do the shootin'."

"Kit, this is the ——est frame-up——" Pete began, but the girl chopped him off.

"You're guilty, or you wouldn't be trying to accuse everybody else of it. You'll be saying next that I did it." She turned to the two men on the ground. "Don't let him get away, boys."

Suddenly Pete was back in his native element like a fish thrown back into water. Trouble was staring him in the face, and he loved it. His six-shooter, his own favorite weapon, came out of the holster like the darting tongue of a snake.

"Try keepin' me," he said in a tone cold as ice, the gun weaving menacingly from one man to the other.

"Don't want any of my game, do y'?" he asked presently. "If it wasn't for Kitty

bein' here I'd send the pair o' ye along over the hump with old Juke," he continued, paying no attention to the fact that his words could be construed as an admission of guilt.

What couldn't a skilful prosecutor do with that boastful, threatening statement in a court-room? But Pete had no intention of ever gracing a court-room—at least as a prisoner.

"Lemme tell y'," he went on in his thin, hard voice, "you've got this cooked up mighty nice, but neither you nor anybody else can take me alive. An' if I ever do git clean away you two fellers had just as well cut your own throats."

There was a note so implacable that the two threatened men involuntarily shuddered.

He started to back his horse away, but his eye chanced to rest on the case containing Knapp's field-glasses. His old, impudent, challenging grin came back on his face.

"I reckon mebbe I'll need them field-glasses a lot more than you will, Knapp," he said. "Pass 'em up here."

Knapp hesitated. To be forced to wallow in the mire of humiliation before Kitty Armstrong was a bitter dose; but the black, ominous hole in the end of the .44 that stared him in the face was all-compelling—though not more so than the gray, sardonic eyes of the Apostle of Violence. Like a man with weights on his feet he advanced and handed over the glasses.

"Thanks," Pete said mockingly, backing his horse away until he was some fifty feet distant. "Don't try any shootin'," he said then. "Remember that I'm a movin' target, an' you're both plumb stationary—in more ways than one."

Then he whirled old Bally and dashed away; but he could not resist sending back a ringing, insolent, defiant yell.

"Well, he's got away," Knapp said.

Despite his recent discomfiture he could not quite restrain the triumph he felt. Juke was dead. Kitty would now own the property, and, for a while at least, she would not be able to get along without his services as foreman. During that time he could accomplish much. And above all Pete Hailey was definitely eliminated.

True enough, Pete's threat made him feel uncomfortable, but Pete was not going to tarry long on the Waterberry range, and

if he did sure hanging awaited him unless he was killed while resisting arrest—which was more probable. Above all Pete was utterly discredited with the girl, which would not have been the case had Whitey assassinated him also.

"We mustn't let him get away," Kitty Armstrong said curtly. "A cold-blooded murderer like that mustn't be permitted to escape."

"That's right," Knapp said with an appearance of briskness, "I'll ride right into town an' notify the sheriff."

"You haven't got time for that," the girl said crisply. "Give him two hours start and we'll never catch him. Come on to the house and rouse the rest of the boys. Form a posse while I raise every ranch in the country, and the sheriff's office as well."

"The telephone! By George, I plumb forget that," Knapp exclaimed exultantly. "It bein' so plumb new thataway in this neighborhood I never once thought of it."

"Pete Hailey is almost sure to go to his own camp for a supply of ammunition, and by that time he will meet a posse no matter which way he turns," the girl said with a grim set to her mouth that reminded one greatly of old Juke Armstrong.

"We'll get him, sure's you live," Knapp agreed.

He looked at the sun, and noted with pleasure that it was still high. He also remembered that it was the twenty-first day of June—the longest day in the year. There would be many hours in which to run Pete Hailey down before nighfall, and even then night would offer the fugitive little protection, for recently the nights had been almost as light as day.

He knew, too, and it gave him the keenest sort of satisfaction, that Pete would go down fighting. There was not one chance in a thousand that he would be taken alive.

"Get on behind me," Kitty ordered Whitey Pett.

Whitey shot an inquiring glance at Knapp which meant, "What about the rifle?"

"Yes; git on—everything else can wait," Knapp said promptly. "We can't be losin' any time."

But while the posse was being raised Whitey sneaked back and removed the rifle.

IV



AS KITTY ARMSTRONG had surmised, Pete's only thought was to get to his camp, get his own rifle and a supply of ammunition. After that he would ride to the Dug-Out Hills twenty-five miles away and get a fresh horse from his brother Jeff. After that his plans were somewhat nebulous.

If he did get away he meant, some way and some time, to come back and get George Knapp and Whitey Pett; but his plans for vengeance were vague—or rather, he had so many in mind that he could decide on none of them. He was dead sure, in his own mind, that Whitey had shot Juke, and that Knapp had put him up to it. It had never occurred to him that the stake the murderers were playing for was a fifty-thousand-dollar ranch. He thought it was merely a scheme of Knapp's to beat his time with Kitty. He possessed a mind that discarded as futile and not worth while all problems that did not deal with the immediate present; which was one of the reasons why he differed so much from his two brothers. Job was continually thinking ahead and worrying about the future, while Jeff was more inclined to grope and probe into the past.

There was no one at camp when Pete arrived, nor any extra saddle-horses. As to the horses, Pete did not care. Old Bally was still comparatively fresh, and he was far and away the best horse on the range, with the possible exception of a full brother to him, a dead ringer for looks, that belonged to his brother Job.

Pete hastily stuffed his cartridge-belt full of .44 cartridges and shoved an extra box in his chaps pocket for good measure. Then he turned his attention to finding cartridges for his own .30-30 Winchester. He had occasion to congratulate himself on his habit of always having plenty of ammunition on hand, for there were eighty-four cartridges in camp. He filled the magazine and stowed the remainder about his person; then, with his rifle across his lap ready for use, he headed for the Dug-Out Hills.

Not once had he remembered the telephone, until it was brought violently to his attention when he saw ten armed men ride out from 4 Dash Ranch and spread themselves across his trail in unmistakably hostile array. He turned to the left, depending upon the speed of old

Bally to get around the edge of them.

For a mile it was a real race, but old Bally's superior speed and endurance began to tell. Several bullets kicked up the dust around him harmlessly, but Pete only grinned. Then, just as he was on the verge of outflanking the posse, he came almost face to face with a posse from another ranch.

With a bitter oath he wheeled his horse in his tracks and turned the other way. A short, sharp race got him out from between the two posses, but they were hard on his heels. He was now headed southeast, in a direction which would take him just a few miles east of Juke Armstrong's ranch and toward the Bar S outfit, of which his brother Job was the foreman. The Apostle of Peace, he felt, was not an ideal man to go to for help in such an emergency, but there seemed nothing else to do.

He saw a posse coming from Armstrong's ranch, but this did not worry him greatly. For a moment he was tempted to meet it in the hope of being able to get his two enemies, but gave it up because he felt that there was a chance they would not both be with it, and he might be killed before he could get the other one.

His one chance now was to get to the Bar S and get a fresh horse, and there was only one trail to it that he could take, because there was a narrow lava bed that ran from somewhere in the Dug-Out Hills the entire length of the valley. It was from forty to fifty miles in length, and averaged a couple of miles in width. On the north side, for the entire distance, it was marked by a deep fissure some twenty to fifty feet in width and about the same in depth.

On the north side it sloped so that a man could usually get in or out without great difficulty; but on the south side was a reef of perpendicular rock that could not be scaled except in the occasional breaks which were frequently eight or ten miles apart.

It was to one of these breaks that Pete had to get if he ever reached the Bar S—and a mile before he reached it he saw still another posse coming that was sure to head him off at that point. His last chance to get help from either of his brothers was gone, and, strangely enough, he had never once thought to appeal to any of his friends who were so repugnant to Job and Jeff. And he knew that many of those so-called friends were with the various posses. By this time old Bally was white with lather, and though

he still had several miles of run left in him, he was no longer capable of any great bursts of speed.

"— the — telephones," Pete cursed whole-heartedly.

But he had no intention of giving up. He knew the range; knew every foot of it for miles in every direction, and it all appeared in his mind clearer than any map could appear to his eyes. All he could do now, he realized, was to find some place to make a last, glorious stand. And he knew a place, some six miles away, where he could give an account of himself that would at least make him remembered in the annals of the Waterberry range. His lips curled into the old, defiant, trouble-loving, challenging smile. A glorious feeling of exultation swept through him like a drink of strong liquor.

He changed his course again, this time almost east. The lava reef, between the break which Pete had failed to reach and the one above, described a sort of horseshoe, and Pete headed directly toward the center of it. To the various posses it appeared that he had deliberately trapped himself. The two original posses had been holding far to the flank in expectation of his turning their way, and now they were in a position easily to head him off before he could reach the next trail above across the lava reef.

The one from Armstrong's and a new one were right on his heels to cut off his retreat, and the one across the reef was paralleling his course so as to intercept him if he should achieve the impossible of breaking through the other posses.

It was one man against a hundred in an open country.

In the center of the reef was a small, round basin, a mile and a half in diameter. From the lip of the volcanic cañon the basin sloped rather abruptly for nearly a half-mile. Then there was a slight rise as the floor of the basin swelled into a small hummock. On the top of this hummock, or knoll, stood a small log-cabin, the relic of some misguided citizen who had once hoped to make a homestead of the arid basin.

Just where the hummock began, between the cabin and the reef, was a pot-hole, probably an ancient buffalo wallow, which was a hundred feet in diameter across the top and perhaps forty feet deep. The hummock itself did not cover more than two acres of ground, and on the other three

sides the basin sloped gradually to its rim, which was fringed with a considerable growth of scrubby quaking-aspens, service brush and chokecherry bushes.

But there was no growth of any kind within the basin except scattered bunches of waving yellow wheat-grass, and these were not dense enough to provide cover for a man.

The cabin could be seen from all sides, and although that part of the basin between the pot-hole and the lip of the lava cañon could not be seen from the other side of the reef, the cabin itself was in plain view. Therefore, the posse on the other side of the reef was able to take shelter behind the rocks and bombard the cabin at a range of half a mile. Though their bullets could not penetrate the thick logs they kept everything inside.

There was a chorus of triumphant yells when Pete led his horse into the cabin. It meant that he was trapped, with no possibility on earth of ever getting out alive. While the posse across the reef was getting entrenched behind the sheltering rocks the other four posses swept down the slopes of the basin toward the cabin.

Pete thrilled with a grim satisfaction. There were windows on two sides of the cabin, and with the barrel of his rifle he hastened to knock out some chinking between the logs on the other two sides, so that he could shoot from any side.

It took just four rifle-bullets for him to stop the rush. There was not a man there who did not know that Pete Hailey, the well-know Apostle of Violence, was a dead shot, and that he was well stocked with ammunition. His four shots had sent two horses to earth, and one man got a bullet in the shoulder, and another received a broken collar-bone. There was a hurried retreat to the shelter of the brush and timber, and the leaders of the various posses got together to discuss a siege.

For a moment Pete was dumfounded. With his usual thoughtlessness he had figured that the posses would do exactly as he would do in their place—rush in and get their man no matter what the cost. He had thought it would soon be over. He would get a dozen or so of them, and they would get him—dead. Now he began to realize just what he had let himself in for. They would keep him there until thirst drove him forth, and then he would have to

surrender or be shot down like a dog without getting a single one of them.

He could not think well unless in action; so he stepped to the other side of the cabin and sent a few bullets across the reef that made the members of that posse extremely careful about showing an arm or a head when they ventured a shot at the cabin. Once he thought of making a dash for the cañon under the reef, but realized at once that it meant suicide and he was not yet ready for that.

Both when he started and when he reached the lip of the cañon he would be in plain view of that posse, and he would be in plain sight of the other posses all the time, though at long range. And should he break through by a miracle the cañon would really offer him no protection. For just a few minutes he was unutterably depressed, and then his natural, inborn optimism reasserted itself. He would stick it out some way until he could find a way to pass out in a blaze of glory, if he could not ultimately escape.

Meantime George Knapp was taking the initiative in getting the right coordination between all the posses. More than fifty men were present, and more were arriving constantly, for Kitty Armstrong had done her duty well at the telephone. Also, a man had been sent to the nearest telephone with the good tidings as soon as Pete was cornered, and naturally every one in the neighborhood wished to be in on the death scene—at safe range. And the cold-blooded murder of old Juke, well liked despite his violent temper, had caused passion to flame high. No representative of the sheriff's office had yet arrived, and Knapp was improving the time by seizing the leadership.

He had hoped that Pete would be killed during the pursuit, but he was in no great amount of despair at the turn things had taken.

"It's goin' to be light as day tonight, fellers," he told each group of men. "He ain't got neither grub nor water, so he's got to come out tomorrer sure, an' somebody'll git him before he gits a hundred yards. The only thing is to make the ring tight."

Knowing the Apostle of Violence the way it did, the posse was willing to accept Knapp's plan, and by the time a deputy sheriff arrived the circle was so arranged that the fugitive stood no possible chance to get through.

Day merged into night so gradually that there was scarcely a difference. A full, mellow moon appeared as if for the express purpose of aiding the man-hunters. It was a trifle hard to line up the rifle sights, and the undulating shadows of the wheat grass bunches as they swayed in the gentle breeze sometimes slightly resembled a man, which tended to make the men a trifle jumpy-nerved; but otherwise it was the same as day.

V



NATURALLY, one of the first places Kitty Armstrong had called up on the telephone was the sheriff's office in Waterberry. Old Zack Miller, the sheriff, was a personal friend of her father's, and she was disappointed that he was not in town. Therefore, she gave the bare details of the killing to the deputy who answered the phone, and went on calling up the surrounding ranches until she was sure there would be enough men out to prevent the murderer getting away.

She retained two of the ranch-men to help her bring her father's body to the house, and when this was accomplished the reaction came. She went into a fit of remorseful sobbing and half-wished that she had permitted Pete Hailey to get away. The fact that she really loved him made her more angry and revengeful at first than she would have been toward any other man.

But this could not last always. When word was phoned in that Pete was finally cornered in the old cabin in Lost Man Basin she became half-hysterical with dismay as her mind pictured a thousand horrors—for which she felt she was directly responsible.

Occasionally a few men would stop at the ranch to satisfy a morbid curiosity before going on to join the posse. Each man took pains to let her know that every able-bodied man in Waterberry, as well as from the surrounding ranches, was hastening to bring her father's slayer to justice. Somehow it did not satisfy her as it should.

The worst of it was there was not one single agency that she could invoke to undo any part of what she had accomplished. Even the sheriff could not prevent another tragedy now, for she knew well enough that Pete would never surrender.

But though the girl could not know it a force was in motion in opposition to the mob within a very few minutes after she had hung

up the phone that had called it into being. That force was nothing less than family loyalty—the same thing that had caused her to forget all else in the desire to avenge her father. It seemed a feeble thing with which to oppose the efforts of a hundred enraged men, but there was a bit of determination about it which the mob spirit could never create.

One of the first men in Waterberry to hear the news was no other than Jeff Hailey, in town for supplies for the Snake Creek outfit in the Dug-Out Hills. Jeff at once slipped into the little telephone office and put in a call for the Bar S ranch.

"Heard about that killing up at Armstrong's ranch?" the girl with the head harness asked.

"No! Who got killed?" Jeff asked with a show of interest.

"Old man Armstrong of the Anchor V ranch. Fellow by the name of Pete Hailey shot him down in cold blood. They've been burning up the wires ever since calling out the men. It may be hard to get your call through," the girl explained.

"Gee, is that so," Jeff queried with interest. "If this call wasn't so danged important I'd let it go an join th' man hunt. I hate to miss bein' in on a killin'—special-ly of a human bein'."

The girl missed the sarcasm.

"I wish I was a man," she said. "I bet I'd make that fellow wish he'd never shot down a poor, helpless old man."

"I bet you would," Jeff murmured gently.

"I'd tear him limb from limb," the girl vouchsafed, giving her gum an extra vicious chew. "Here's your party."

A woman's voice replied to Jeff.

"Hello, Mrs. Stacy," he called. "This is Jeff. Is the Apostle of Peace where he can be got to the phone?"

He knew very well that Mrs. Stacy would know who was meant, and that the telephone operator would not. He also surmised that the news would not have been phoned to the Bar S because it was so far out of Pete's logical trail, and also because they might fear that the Bar S, having Pete's brother as foreman, might offer him some aid.

"He ain't come in from work yet," Mrs. Stacy said doubtfully.

"Say, Mrs. Stacy, you see if you can't round him up immediate, an' have him put in a call for Jeff Smith here at the telephone

office in Waterberry, right away." Please."

"Jeff—Smith?"

"Yeah," he cut in hurriedly. "Don't forget to give him that name."

"All right. I reckon you've been up to some more of your monkey shines. Maybe you think that's all Job has to do is look after you and that hot-headed brother of yours. But I'll tell him."

She hung up, and Jeff had an uneasy moment until he made sure that the girl had attached no importance to what she had heard. The next hour, however, was an eternity to Jeff. He possessed a rather vivid imagination, and in his mind he could see every detail of the hunt for his fiery, high-strung brother. In spite of the fact that he pretended to disapprove of Pete's arrogant ways, and his propensity for getting into trouble he possessed a sneaking admiration of Pete's nerve, and he drew some satisfaction from the fact that if Pete had to go down it would be fighting.

At last the girl announced—

"Call for Jeff Smith."

Jeff leaped to the telephone booth.

"Hello. This the Apostle o' Peace?" he asked guardedly.

"What's the matter? What kind of trouble have you been gittin' into now?" Job asked irritably, letting his voice establish his identity.

"Not a thing. This is strictly business I want to talk over. But first have you heard the news? A feller by the name of Pete Hailey has gone an' killed old Juke Armstrong of the Anchor V," Jeff said, trying desperately to make his tone sound casual.

He waited in an agony of apprehension for Job to take the cue.

The Apostle of Peace rose to the occasion. His voice was as casual as Jeff's as he replied:

"Has, huh? People been expectin' it for some time, ain't they?"

"So they say," Jeff returned. "But what I wanted to see you about was to ask if you wouldn't git on your bald-faced sorrel an' ride over to meet that cattleman on his way to the Dug Out-Hills. You know he's purty violent-tempered, an' it'd be better to have somebody meet him there. I've got some things to 'tend to at this end of the line so I can't go. But he left about three o'clock, an' you'll have to ride like — if you head him off."

"All right," came Job's quiet voice. "I'll see what can be done. You look after things on that end—there may be something that's been overlooked."

Jeff heard the receiver click, and he paid the bill. The girl accepted the fee calmly. Quite evidently she suspected nothing out of the ordinary in the conversation she had just heard. For the first time since he had heard about the killing Jeff breathed freely. He knew that it was a slim chance that Job could help Pete any, but if there was a chance he knew Job would grasp it. The thing they both hoped to accomplish was for Job to get mistaken for Pete and draw off the posse. It was for that reason Jeff had mentioned the advisability of Job riding his bald-faced sorrel. If that failed, however, Job would have to try something else.



MEANTIME, Jeff knew that his own job was to find out what was at the bottom of the killing. He knew better than most just how hot-headed and quarrelsome Pete was, but he did not believe for a moment that Pete would stoop to a cold-blooded murder. He strolled over to the sheriff's office and there learned all the particulars as they had been phoned in by Kitty Armstrong.

"What have you fellows done?" Jeff asked.

"Sent a deputy out to take charge of things, but we're afraid the mob'll git him. Everybody's out after him," a deputy said.

"Where's Zack?" Jeff asked.

"Out o' town. Won't be back till after dark, an' maybe not till mornin'."

"I wish he was here," Jeff said wistfully.

"I figure I might git him interested in provin' that Pete didn't kill Juke."

"Bein' a brother of Pete, naturally you're inclined to make excuses for him, but I'm afraid it's no good. The evidence is too strong."

"I'd like to take a look around out there," Jeff said in the same wistful tone, "but I want to have Zack with me when I do. Just so's you'll all know that I ain't plannin' anything crooked I'd like to stay right here till Zack comes. An' I can prove where I've been every minute since the word was phoned in."

"That's all right, Jeff—nobody ain't suspectin' you of anything," the deputy said.

Only a few minutes later the telephone rang, and when the deputy had listened to

the voice that came over the wire he turned he'll Jeff and remarked:

"Here's bad news for y', Jeff. The boys out there have got Pete surrounded in that old cabin in Lost Man Basin. There's no chance for him to git away. If he's sensible he'll surrender an' stand trial."

Jeff cringed out of sheer pain. His first impulse was to rush out and get to Lost Man Basin as fast as possible. He quickly repressed that feeling, however, for he knew that Job was on the job somewhere and would do all that could be done. His own work was elsewhere, but he could do nothing—but think—until the arrival of the sheriff.

"Pete won't ever surrender," Jeff asserted with a bit of pride, "an' they'll know they've done something before they git him."

"I don't know—'twon't be hard to starve him out," the deputy grinned.

Jeff studied the man intently, also the other members of the sheriff's force. There was not one spark of imagination among them. There was one weak link in the chain of evidence about Pete, and Jeff ached to investigate it. But he knew, too, that its value to Pete depended upon its being investigated by officers. Should he go it alone and find any proof, it would not be accepted because he was Pete's brother. There was only one man capable of seeing that weak link even when it was pointed out, and that was Zack Miller. He must wait for Zack.

Night came, and the sheriff had not yet arrived. That meant that nothing could be done at least until morning. But had Jeff ever been given a nickname to conform with his traits it would have been "The Apostle of Patience."

VI



THOUGH two years younger than Pete, Job, the Apostle of Peace, considered himself in a way the natural guardian of his hot-headed elder brother, as well as of his somewhat frivolous younger brother. The news of Pete's trouble had hit him harder than it had Jeff, for, unlike the younger brother, he had absolutely no admiration of Pete's propensity for trouble. Also, he had been worrying over the matter ever since hearing that Juke had ordered Pete to stay off his ranch.

Yet not once did it occur to him to fail

Pete in his hour of need. Ten minutes after hearing the news from Jeff he was on his own bald-faced sorrel, ready to take the trail in an effort to get the posse on to his own trail. It was characteristic of him that he took no weapon, but that he tied to his saddle a little grub and a water-bag.

It was a long way from the Bar S to Pete's probable route to the Dug-Out Hills, but the bald-faced sorrel was capable of throwing the miles behind him at terrific speed, and Job knew how to ride in such a manner as to conserve the last bit of energy in his horse. Even so, as he neared the lava cañon his range-hardened eye told him that he was too late. Clouds of floating dust, through which he could just barely discern moving horsemen, told him that Pete was to all intents and purposes surrounded.

Job just missed being seen by the posse that was sweeping up the south side of the reef. He followed it cautiously, and was in time to see Pete reach the shelter of the cabin and turn back the first assault.

"Trapped—trapped like a — rat," Job cursed. "Now," he muttered, "that — pride of his will make him go the limit. If he'd had any sense he'd have surrendered an' took his chances with a trial."

Presently Job found a place of concealment for himself and horse, and from there he watched the cordon of men being drawn about the basin in a chain that seemingly could not be broken—at least by Pete alone. If there were two men besieged in there now, he thought, there might be a chance. Slowly and methodically he set to work to think out a plan that would work. He was now a man with a single idea, and that was to help Pete escape.

He left his horse concealed among the lava rocks and, taking the grub and water, and his lasso-rope, walked to the top of the reef. With little difficulty he succeeded in finding a place where the reef was only twenty feet in height. He tied one end of the lasso rope around a jutting end of rock and with the grub and water tied to his waist let himself gently down to the bottom of the cañon. Leaving the rope dangling, he proceeded up the gorge, keeping well under the shelter of the reef, until he was exactly beneath the posse that was bombarding the cabin from the shelter of the masses of boulders above the reef.

He could hear their voices clearly as they shouted to each other—some of them were

not three rods from him. They talked about Pete as one already beyond the pale. They spoke laughingly of the thirst which they figured must already be tormenting him, and jokingly made bets about the number of hours he might hold out, or how far from the cabin he could get before somebody "nailed" him. With no more compassion than coyotes around a lost, crippled sheep, Job thought bitterly.

Slowly, as he listened, Job's feelings began to change. He had answered the call of family loyalty and come to Pete's assistance for that reason alone; but now he was catching the mob spirit and the lust to kill was mastering him. The desire of the civilized man to kill the killer was his. But to him the real killers, the men with murder in their hearts, were the members of the posse. He began to thrill with pride over the way Pete was holding them at bay.

But he did not lose his habitual caution. He had formed a plan, but it required considerable time, as well as a lot of daring, to work out. But the latter element did not enter into Job's calculations. He had to get into that cabin with Pete, and that was all there was to it.

There was no one between him and Pete because the top of the reef commanded a much better view of the cabin than the other lip of the cañon, and the protection was much better. The slight difference in distance was immaterial. But the moment Job attempted to go over the lip of the cañon he would be recognized, and that would spoil everything, even if he was able to get over the top in safety. He would only have to crawl a rod before he would be screened from the men on the reef by the natural slope of the basin, but in the glare of sunlight it was scarcely possible that he could get that far unrecognized.

With stoical patience he waited under the reef, listening to the coarse, brutal talk above him until the sun went down. He noted with a grim sort of satisfaction that some of the men who talked the most brutally were men whom Pete had called his best friends.

At last the night breeze began to blow, and he judged it was time to take the first step in his plan. He crawled slowly to the lip of the cañon and, throwing himself on his belly, he began to wriggle across the rod of ground where he was in sight of the posse that was less than a hundred yards away

Fortunately there were a few scattered boulders there, and by taking a half-hour to cross the fifteen feet he was able to give a credible imitation of one.

At last he heaved a sigh of relief as he noted, by a cautious glance back over his shoulder, that he was out of sight of this posse at least. He was, however, in full view of the rest of the ring of men surrounding the basin, though at long range. But it was part of the plan that they should see him, though not clearly enough to be able to identify him.

His real danger, now, was from Pete. That Apostle of Violence would be alert as any night-hawk, and the slightest stir that looked the least bit unnatural was sure to bring a bullet. But he continued his slow, cautious advance, trying to look as much as possible like the few, scattered, swaying bunches of wheat-grass.

At last he reached the foot of the hummock, but in the blur of moonlight he knew that it would be rank suicide to go up the slope toward the cabin. Nothing that moved, ever so slightly, could escape Pete's eagle eye at that distance. Furthermore, he wanted the posse to see him get into the cabin—if he ever did. He crawled into the pot-hole and waited until morning.

Here he was concealed from everybody, and to pass the time away he cut down bunches of the wheat-grass and plaited a sort of rude blanket out of the long, yellow blades. It was an unsightly affair, as long tufts of grass stood up like the quills on a porcupine, and it had little value as a shelter from the cool, night air.



WITHIN the cabin Pete Hailey prowled restlessly from side to side, determined that no man could sneak upon him unawares. He considered himself, for all practical purposes, as well as dead; but he vowed that he would not be killed without giving an account of himself. The chances of ultimate escape seemed to be more and more remote. In fact, the one chance that seemed to offer was that the next night might prove to be darker. If he could hold out that long he might be able to sneak away.

The log walls of the cabin afforded fairly safe protection from bullets, but he had nothing to combat the raging demon of thirst which was already beginning to torment him. For a while he had stayed it off

somewhat by chewing tobacco, but at last that poor comfort was gone.

That the members of the posse were not asleep was proved when he constructed a crude dummy out of loose floor-boards, covered with his coat and hat, and shoved it out the door. It was struck by no less than three bullets. There were real marksmen out there.

The long night passed at last. In the grayish light of dawn Pete rather expected an attack. His nerves became like the strings of an overkeyed violin. But nothing happened. The sun came up, and Pete realized that he was dripping with perspiration. He laughed a hollow, mocking laugh at himself as he mopped his face—such as only a man who feels that the whole world is arrayed against him can laugh. But it did him good. The old, challenging grin, a trifle ironic, was firmly back in place. Nor had he relaxed a fraction of his vigilance.

Suddenly, as he peeped through his loop-hole in the north end of the cabin, he saw a human head emerge from the pot-hole northeast of the cabin. It was about three hundred yards distant—too far away for a revolver shot. He shoved the barrel of his rifle cautiously through the crack between the logs where he had knocked out the chinking, and drew a bead on the slowly rising head. At the very moment when the added weight of a finger would have forever terminated the career of the Apostle of Peace, Pete's trigger-finger was checked. The perfect familiarity which brothers acquire with each other's slightest movement warned Pete to wait. A moment later he saw who it was.

"Job, by all that's unreasonable!" he ejaculated.

He saw that Job was making furtive signs to him which he could not make out. He withdrew the rifle and applied Knapp's field-glasses to the crack. Then he understood the signs. He went to the other side of the cabin and commenced whanging away at the posse across the reef. A wave of jubilation swept over him. He was no longer friendless and alone.

Meantime Job was crawling slowly and cautiously toward the cabin. He had not gone a rod before some member of the posse saw him. Swiftly the word ran around the circle of men that some fellow was trying to sneak in on Pete

Hailey and catch him unaware.

The deputy sheriff who had assumed command of all the posses quickly passed the order to begin a lively fire upon the cabin from the south, east and west to cover his advance. Men had been coming up to join in the siege at all hours, so no count of the men had ever been made. No one doubted for a moment that it was some dare-devil working for the glory of killing Pete.

To the posse it appeared that the stranger's plan might succeed. Bunch after bunch of wheat-grass he reached in seeming safety. At last he was within twenty feet of the cabin. Now, it appeared to the posse, was the critical time. Obviously he was going to make a rush for the door, and so the firing from that side had to cease. Those who could see him almost ceased to breathe as they saw him crouch, ready to run. He headed toward the door with tremendous bounds.

"By —, he's going to make it," the deputy sheriff exclaimed as the stranger reached the door.

But the next moment he let out a groan as the unknown suddenly threw up both hands and staggered back a few steps. Then, with both hands high in the air and head bowed with humiliation, the apparent seeker after glory slowly entered the cabin.

"The — fool. He mighta knowed he couldn't surprize Pete Hailey!" the deputy declared angrily.

A few minutes later he had occasion for further remarks. The same man, apparently, who had just been made a prisoner, marched out of the door. He wore the same yellow shirt and wide-rimmed white felt hat, which was pulled well down over his face. Pete's shirt was crimson-colored, and his hat was a brown beaver.

The prisoner walked out to the nearest bunch of wheat-grass and, kneeling, began to cut the grass with a pocket-knife. When he had an armful he carried it back to the cabin. None who saw him doubted that he was covered by Pete's revolver every instant.

"Of all the nerve," the deputy commented admiringly. "He's makin' that poor sucker cut an' carry wheat-grass in to his horse."

He made many trips, each time getting farther and farther away from the cabin. At last he headed for a good-sized clump

within a couple of rods of the pot-hole. But instead of dropping to his knees there he suddenly began to sprint for the pot-hole. An involuntary cheer went up from the rim of the basin, but each separate cheer broke off in the middle as if the cheerer had been suddenly choked. There came two short, vicious, ominous barks from a .44, and the unlucky runner threw up his arms convulsively, gave two or three lurching steps that carried him to the edge of the pot-hole and collapsed.

Those watching saw him start to roll helplessly down the steep side of the pot-hole, his body twisting helplessly around the clumps of wheat-grass as he rolled. Then he was out of sight, but imagination could easily visualize the bloody, huddled mass of flesh that had once been a man; that now weltered in gore at the bottom of the pot-hole.

"Well, that settles it," the white-faced deputy sheriff said. "I had a morsel of compassion for that bird before, but if that wasn't a cold-blooded murder then I never saw one."

Under the stress of emotion he had forgotten himself for a moment and had stepped out in sight of the cabin. There came a puff of smoke from a cabin window, and a bullet threw dust all over him. With an angry oath he sprang back under cover, and an occasional bullet from the cabin warned him that he had better stay there.

VII



SHERIFF ZACK MILLER had not intended hurrying back to Waterberry, but a telegram telling him of the murder of his old friend, Juke Armstrong, had caused him to drop everything and hurry back. So it happened that just before daylight he breezed in on his deputies in the county jail and demanded particulars of the murder.

He listened gravely while his office deputy told him the particulars. Then his eyes roamed to Jeff Hailey, who had occupied a cot in the office.

"What have ye got his brother here for?" Zack demanded.

"He wanted to stay. Come here right after the news was phoned in so's to prove an alibi—though I don't see where he needs it none," the deputy replied.

"What's the ideer, boy?" Zack demanded gruffly.

"I want everybody to know that I ain't been near the Armstrong ranch to plant anything," Jeff said seriously. "Kit Armstrong said that Pete denied killin' Juke, an' if Pete said he didn't, he didn't; that's all. So I figure there must be somethin' to show that somebody else done it. That's why I waited for you—I want you to help me find it."

"No chance, Jeff," the sheriff said kindly. "Kitty's story proves complete that it couldn't be anybody else."

"I can convince you without leavin' this room that there's a big chance Pete didn't do it, an' if you'll go with me out there I believe we can prove it," Jeff asserted.

"I'm listenin'," Zack said noncommittally.

His deputies looked disgusted.

"My talk's for your ear alone," Jeff insisted.

"All right. Clear out o' here," Zack commanded his office force, and they disappeared.

"They say them horse-tracks show that Pete wasn't more than twenty feet from Juke when Juke was killed. Does it stand to reason that Pete would have lugged out a rifle from under his leg to shoot Juke with? Pete's favorite weapon is a six-gun, an' if he figured any on a gun-fight with Juke that's the weapon he'd have had handy. Old Juke was too much of an artist with fire-arms himself for Pete to take chances on usin' a rifle at that range."

"By golly, that sounds reasonable, all right," Zack admitted. "That is, knowin' Juke an' Pete the way we do. Still, the fact remains that the empty ca'triddle was found right there, an' now the doc says Juke was killed with a bullet from a .250-3000 rifle. So far's I know Knapp owns the only one in the country."

"You heard the deputy say they'd made inquiries about another one, an' couldn't hear of one. There was only one shot fired you know, so who else could 'a' done it?"

"I claim it must have been a frame-up," Jeff argued. "I don't know how that empty shell got there. It may have been an empty in the gun, an' Pete throwed it out after Juke was killed, or somebody may have throwed it there a-purpose. I claim the shot that killed Juke was fired from that lava knoll like Pete claimed it was, an' I bet

we can find something there that'll prove it."

Zack Miller owed his reputation as a successful criminal catcher to the fact that he used common sense and never overlooked a bet.

"I'll go with y', Jeff, an' we'll find out. But first we'll go see Tony. If he cleaned Knapp's rifle he'll know how many shells was in it," he said.

Zack gave a few curt directions to his assistants; then he and Jeff called on the gun-maker.

"Dat gun she have seven cat-ridge in her when I feex him," Tony declared positively.

"All loaded?" the sheriff asked.

"Sure, Mike."

"Did anybody handle that gun between the time you reloaded it, and the time when Pete took it away?" Jeff asked thoughtfully.

"I t'ink nobody touch dat gun, 'cept one tam George Knapp she call for dat gun an' tak' him out mebbe ten, twent' minutes; den fetch her back an' say leave him till call for, 'cause she's done change her mind," Tony explained.

"You sure you didn't count the shells after that, Tony?" Zack Miller demanded.

"Sure, Mike! I'm done wit' dat gun when I feex her up."

There was a thoughtful look on the sheriff's face as he mounted his saddle-horse, and a confident one on Jeff's. That little investigation at Tony's, it seemed to both men, made one point perfectly clear—if Jeff's conjecture was correct, then the shell Pete ejected must have been empty, and it must have been put in the gun with malice aforethought by George Knapp.

Arrived at the gate into the Anchor V Ranch where Juke Armstrong had been killed, Zack got off his horse and measured the distances carefully. Jeff watched him silently, without taking any part.

"— if it don't seem funny that Pete would use a rifle at that distance," Zack declared.

Then the two of them, on foot, began an inch by inch search of the lava knoll. For an hour they searched, Jeff always staying behind, determined not to nullify any discovery that might be made by leaving a suspicion that he might have tampered with it in any way.

Suddenly the sheriff gave an exclamation.

"By golly, somebody's been here," he

cried. "Look at them there cigaret butts!"

There were a half-dozen butts on the rocks, conclusive proof that somebody had been in that spot for some time. Jeff restrained his impulse to leap into the crevice where the sheriff stood and look for something else. The sheriff was slow in his movements, but if there were other clues he would find them.

Old Zack kneeled down and put his eye to a small aperture in the rocks. When he arose his face was grim.

"This hole commands a view of the gate," he said. "A man could kneel right here an' plunk a man at the gate without bein' seen."

Then he began a more careful search about his feet. Presently he uttered another exclamation, and kneeling, fished an empty cartridge out of a small crack in the rocks after considerable difficulty. It fitted a .250-3000 rifle.

"Youngster," the sheriff said slowly, "you've saved your brother's hide—'less'n he's already got it punctured. When the murderer ejected that shell it landed in this crack in the lavas, an' he either couldn't find it, or it was too much trouble to dig out."

"The question is—who done the shoot-in?" Jeff asked.

The sheriff's face fell.

"I was a-thinkin' it was George Knapp; but it couldn't have been him. He's got his alibi. I guess this don't even start to clear Pete."

"Juke was killed by somebody actin' for Knapp," Jeff insisted steadily. "My guess is it's Whitey Pett."

"Mine too," the sheriff said glumly, "but we ain't got a thing to prove it. All we can do for Pete is to try to prove a doubt, but it won't go far with a jury o' cattlemen."

"Then we ain't done nothin'," Jeff said bitterly. "Unless Pete knows he's plumb cleared he won't come out. He'd rather go down fightin' than face a jury."

"Well, we ain't got a thing to hang it on to either Knapp or Whitey," said Zack. "Reckon y' want to ride over to see whether they've got Pete yet or not?"

"Sure," Jeff said sharply.

"Lemme warn ye—don't show yer hand, or make any fool breaks."

"All right. But listen. You've got to make them two fellers confess," Jeff said.

"Can't be done," the sheriff said. "If they're guilty they've got too good a hand

to weaken. They'll stand pat. You watch."

"I gotta scheme," Jeff said humbly. And as they rode he told what it was.



THEY rode up to a bunch of men who were watching the cabin from a fringe of timber on the west side of the basin. Here they found not only the deputy sheriff, who ostensibly represented the majesty of the law, but George Knapp and Whitey Pett as well. It was evident that something exciting had just happened.

"Well, boys, how's it goin'?" Zack asked by way of greeting.

"Zack, we've just seen one of the coldest-blooded murders ever pulled off," George Knapp declared vehemently.

Zack ignored Knapp and looked to his deputy for particulars.

"Some fool guy tried to crawl in there alone to nab Hailey, an' Pete got the drop on 'im. Then he made the guy come out an' cut wheat-grass for his horse; but the guy tried to make a gitaway into that pot-hole—an' Pete plugged him in the back twice."

The sheriff turned to Jeff.

"That settles the case for Pete," he said grimly. "If I don't bring him out o' there I resign my office."

Very coolly he rode out of the timber to the edge of the basin. Almost instantly a rifle-bullet from the cabin spattered into the dirt on one side of him at his horse's feet, and then another bullet dropped on the other side. The sheriff stayed long enough to complete his survey of the basin and coolly returned to his men.

"Has anybody seen anything of my brother Job?" Jeff asked Dick Plummer, the owner of the 4 Bar 4.

"No; Job ain't showed up around here—he's got too much sense to be takin' up any of Pete's troubles. Wasn't it you named him the Apostle o' Peace?" was the reply.

Jeff nodded.

"Boys," said the sheriff, "it's cloudin' up. There's a chance it'll be dark to-night, an' if it is Pete Hailey may sneak out. Besides, that poor devil in the pot-hole may not be dead yet. I'm goin' to deputize every man here, an' sometime this afternoon we're goin' in after him. If I can't git anybody to go in with me I'll go alone."

"Now yer talkin'," agreed Dick Plummer.

"To handle a bunch o' men like this you got to take him when the blood's hot. They're

all riled up now 'bout this killin' they saw an hour or two ago. If it wasn't for that some of 'em would be sneakin' off home before this."

Men were dispatched around the circle to prepare for the proposed attempt to take the cabin by storm; but for some strange reason the sheriff himself seemed in no hurry. Instead, he called for his deputy and Dick Plummer to join him in a conference. George Knapp attempted to horn in on the conference, but the reception he received was not all what he thought it should be, and he withdrew.

Jeff Hailey, sitting alone, seemingly moody and discouraged, saw Knapp hunt up Whitey Pett and watched them in earnest conversation behind some bushes; he would have liked to listen in on their talk, but that, he knew, was impossible.

Presently the sheriff and his deputy mounted their horses and rode away, but in so doing they passed on the opposite side of the bushes from Knapp and Whitey Pett, whom they evidently had not observed. Right at that spot, however, the sheriff stopped to light his pipe, and the deputy stopped with him.

Jeff was where he could watch both parties, and he smiled as he saw Knapp and Whitey shut up like clams in an attempt to be unobserved by the sheriff. Knapp, Jeff knew, was the type of man who would never let an opportunity to eavesdrop go unused.

"It's too — bad that Pete had to go an' shoot that guy now that we know he didn't kill Juke Armstrong," the deputy was saying as Zack lighted his pipe.

At that moment Jeff saw the two men on the other side of the bush give convulsive jerks. He smiled again. He knew that the conversation the sheriff and his deputy were having had originated in his own brain.

"Yes; but a hot-headed fool like Pete hadn't ought to be at large anyway," the sheriff said.

"But I can't see the object in not grabbin' them other two fellers right away," the deputy objected.

"Well, it's this way," the sheriff stated. "Them two trappers that heard 'em plannin' to kill Juke might git scared an' make poor witnesses on the stand. An' outside o' that we ain't got no evidence against 'em 'cept that duplicate. 250-3000 rifle, an' the empty ca'tridge that we found up on the lava knoll.

After we raid the cabin I'm goin' to do a little third-degree work. I can see it in the eyes of one of 'em that he'll squeal on the other one just as soon as we tell him what we know. If he don't, of course we'll convict 'em both, though it may cost the county a lot o' money. But that one would rather go free than stand trial."

Just then it occurred to the deputy that he, too, needed a smoke. He asked for the sheriff's tobacco, and began to fill his pipe. Meanwhile, he said:

"I've thought of somethin'. You say the only evidence lackin' is to explain how that empty shell come to be where Pete stood. Mebbe you're guessin' wrong. You say every shell in Knapp's rifle must have been loaded because after Tony cleaned it he wouldn't have put an empty back in. Mebbe Pete shot at a rabbit on the way out, an' forgot to throw out the empty—or mebbe somebody monkeyed with that gun between the time Tony cleaned it, an' Pete called for it."

"By golly, you may be right!" Sheriff Zack exclaimed. "We'll quiz Tony, an' if anybody's had their hands on that gun that might be interested in slippin' in an empty shell to frame up Pete Hailey we won't need no confession. I don't know whether I'll mention the matter to that one or not. Of course, if he happens to cave voluntarily before then we'll have to let him off with a light sentence."

By that time the deputy's pipe was lighted and the two men moved on. But on the other side of the bush were two frightened and amazed men, who gazed into each other's eyes with sudden, murderous suspicion.

Whitey Pett was well-nigh paralyzed with stark fear. For the moment he was incapable of thought or action, but George Knapp was sure that at the first opportunity Whitey would seek the sheriff and confess. That meant the gallows for one George Knapp. Knapp's eyes roamed about furtively for a second. Not far away was Jeff Hailey, and Jeff was watching them with a grin on his face. Jeff had come with the sheriff.

He turned in another direction, and there was Dick Plummer of the 4 Bar 4—also watching. He had seen Plummer in conference with the officers, therefore Plummer must know all that Zack and the deputy knew. Knapp felt that the moment he

tried to get away he would be stopped. There seemed but one way to avoid the gallows, and he took it.

"Sheriff," he called.

Old Zack and the deputy whirled their horses, and Knapp rushed out to meet them.

"Sheriff," he said, "I heard yer talk, an' I'm goin' to come clean. I helped Whitey plan the thing that led to Juke's killin', an' I claim immunity. Them trappers misunderstood. I never meant to have Juke killed. Whitey had a grudge at Juke, an' he wanted to shoot him. He promised to only wound him, an' on that understandin' I planned it for him so's that Juke would think it was Pete Hailey done it. But this—tin-horn went an' killed him, an' that's the God's truth."

His voice had sunk to a whine, and the words were fairly tumbling out in his haste to beat Whitey to it.

"He's a liar," Whitey Pett screamed. "He promised me fifteen hundred dollars fer killin' Juke."

"Tell the truth, Whitey," Knapp said coldly. "We're in for it, so you can't gain nothin' by lyin' about me."

For a moment Whitey glared wildly, while the idea percolated into his brain that Knapp had beaten him to it. Suddenly his hand flashed to his hip. Before Knapp could move Whitey's revolver was spitting death.

Old Zack spurred his horse madly, and the animal made a tremendous leap, its breast-bone striking Whitey squarely in the chest and bowling him over. Before the little gambler could move the deputy was on top of him, but too late to do George Knapp any good. Whitey had fired twice, and both bullets had hit the heart.

VIII



"PETE HAILEY must be purty durn near frantic with thirst by this time. We'll wait till sundown, I reckon, before we waste any more lives goin' in after him, but if he ain't come out by that time in we go."

It was Sheriff Zack Miller speaking, and it was to Dick Plummer and several other ranchers he was speaking. A number of men had heard Whitey's shots and came running. Old Zack had very wisely started his deputy to town with Whitey Pett before making explanations.

When the real truth concerning the mur-

der of Juke Armstrong was known there was a general feeling that Whitey should be lynched, but by that time he was too far away.

And Zack had judiciously called their attention to the fact that they had all seen Pete Hailey kill a man in cold blood, and that Pete was still in the cabin—a fact that was attested to every now and then by a rifle-bullet that threw dirt on some incautious rancher or cowboy.

"It's durn tough," the sheriff went on. "It was Jeff here that dug out the truth of the killin' an' fixed up the scheme that made Knapp confess; but all he's done won't do Pete the least bit o' good 'count o' this other killin'."

"Listen, sheriff," Jeff said suddenly. "If I leave my gun, an' don't take any grub or water with me, will you let me go in there an' try to persuade Pete to give up?"

"Will we? Well, son, we shore will!" Zack said enthusiastically. "But he's apt to kill you the minute you step out in sight," he added doubtfully.

"You remember Pete took them glasses away from George Knapp," Jeff reminded. "I've got an idea that them glasses is trained on every man that steps out in sight. I've seen that bird in there miss at least six shots since I've been here, an' I know his shootin' well enough to know that he could 'a' got some of 'em if he'd 'a' wanted to."

"I figure he's missin' because he's gittin' jumpy from thirst, but if you want to try, go ahead," Zack said.

Jeff mounted his horse and rode boldly into sight. Immediately there came the bark of a rifle from the cabin and a bullet sang unpleasantly close, but Jeff rode on. There was a breathless moment followed, but no more shots. Everybody heaved a sigh of relief as it became evident that Jeff had been recognized. Straight to the cabin Jeff rode. He dismounted, walked into the cabin and did not appear for fifteen minutes. Then he came out and waved a white handkerchief—the agreed upon sign that Pete was ready to surrender.

Immediately the sheriff and the men who were with him started slowly for the cabin. Gradually, the other members of the posse recognized that there had been a surrender, and they came pouring in. Under the excitement to get there first it became a wild race near the finish, and they all arrived

at practically the same time—except those on the other side of the reef, who were barred from getting across.

"It's all right is it, Jeff?" demanded the sheriff of the young puncher lounging by the door. "There won't be no double-cross?"

"No; come on in," Jeff answered mildly. "He's harmless as a suckin' dove."

The sheriff stepped inside the bullet-riddled cabin, and as many as could get in followed him. In one end of the cabin stood a frightened, bald-faced horse, unharmed because the thick walls had resisted the bullets. On a bench in the other end of the cabin sat a dejected-looking man with his face buried in his hands. At first all the sheriff could see was the well-remembered crimson shirt and brown beaver hat which Pete habitually wore.

"Well, Pete," old Zack said gruffly, "you're under arrest."

The man on the bench lifted his dejected-looking head, and the men in the cabin recoiled. The man they saw was the Apostle of Peace.

Zack Miller was the first to recover himself.

"What kind of a ——— trick is this?" he demanded. "Where's Pete?"

"If he took my advice I reckon he's well into the Dug-Out Hills by this time," Job said wearily. "But bein' such a plumb natural, trouble-lovin' fool I reckon you'll find him over on the Armstrong ranch. He swore he'd make that girl over there see reason an' settle with George Knapp an'

Whitey Pett before he took to the hills."

"What about that dead man in the pot-hole?" somebody shouted.

Instantly there was a wild rush down the slope, and another gasp of amazement. The pot-hole was empty. Slowly comprehension dawned upon the erstwhile mob. It was Job whom they had seen try to rush the cabin. Then he and Pete had exchanged clothes, and Job had pretended to kill his brother at the edge of the pot-hole. While Pete got away Job had held the posse at bay.

"What I want to know," blurted out Dick Plummer, "is how Pete got out o' the pot-hole without bein' seen?"

A slow grin came over the face of the Apostle of Peace.

"You see that wheat grass stubble down there?" he asked. "Well, I made a sort of a bushy blanket out o' the grass last night, an' Pete just throwed it over his head an' walked out to the coulée beneath the reef. It didn't take him an hour to git that far because I watched him with these field-glasses, an' nobody ever thought he was anything but a wheat grass—all too busy watchin' the cabin I s'pose. I left a rope to help him over the ledge, an' my horse was right on top. If he'd have had any sense he could have got clear away."

"Boys," Sheriff Zack said deliberately, addressing the members of his posse, "you kin all go home now. You're discharged. An'," he added under his breath, "whenever I need a posse again I'll just call in the three Hailey Apostles."

